

# MOLLY McDONALD

A TALE OF THE FRONTIER

By RANDALL PARRISH

Author of "Keith of the Border," "My Lady of Doubt," "My Lady of the South," etc., etc.

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## SYNOPSIS.

Major McDonald, commanding an army post near Fort Dodge, seeks a man to intercept his daughter, Molly, who is headed for the post. An Indian outbreak is threatened. "Tricks" Hamlin meets the stage in which Molly is traveling. They are attacked by Indians, and Hamlin and Molly escape in the darkness. Hamlin tells Molly he was discharged from the Confederate service in disgrace and at the close of the war enlisted in the regular army. He suspects one Captain LeFevre of being responsible for his disgrace. Troops appear and under escort of Lieut. Gaskins Molly starts to join her father. Hamlin leaves to rejoin his regiment. He returns to Fort Dodge after a summer of fighting Indians, and finds Molly there. Shots are heard in the night. Hamlin rushes out, seeing what he believes is the figure of Molly hiding in the darkness and falls over the body of Lieutenant Gaskins, who accuses Hamlin of shooting him. The sergeant is proven innocent. He sees Molly in company with Mrs. Dupont, whom he recognizes as a former sweetheart, who threw him over for LeFevre. Mrs. Dupont tells Hamlin LeFevre forced her to send him a living note. Hamlin declares he has been looking for LeFevre to force him to clear his record. Later he overhears Dupont and a soldier hatching up a money-making plot. Molly seeks an interview with Hamlin. She says her father seems to be in the power of Mrs. Dupont's claims to be a daughter of McDonald's sister. Molly disappears and Hamlin sets out to trace her. McDonald is ordered to Fort Ripley. Hamlin discovers that the man who left on the stage under the name of McDonald was not the major. He finds McDonald's murdered body. Hamlin takes Wason, a guide, and two troopers and goes in pursuit of the murderers, who had robbed McDonald of \$2000 paymaster's money. He suspects Dupont. Company soldiers accompany Dupont. He is found murdered. Hamlin's party is caught in a fierce blizzard while heading for the Cimmaron. One man dies from cold and another almost succumbs. Wason is shot as they come in sight of the Cimmaron. Heroic work Hamlin resuscitates Carroll, his remaining trooper. Hamlin discovers a log cabin hidden under a bluff, occupied by Hughes, a cow who is clear for LeFevre, who cheated him in a cattle deal. His description identifies LeFevre and Dupont as one and the same. Hughes shot Wason, mistaking him for one of LeFevre's party. Hamlin decides to wait at the cabin until the storm abates before attempting to take up the trail of LeFevre, who is carrying Molly to the Indians' camp.

## CHAPTER XXIX.—Continued.

The cowman, muffled to the ears in a buffalo coat, plunged profanely into the drift, slamming the door behind him. Hamlin hastily glanced over the few articles piled in readiness on the bench—ammunition, blankets, food—paying no heed to Carroll's muttering of discontent. By the time Hughes returned, he had everything strapped for the saddles. He thrust the cowman's rifle under his own flap, but handed the latter a revolver, staring straight into his eyes as he did so.

"I reckon you and I have got enough in common in this chase to play square," he said grimly. "We're both out after LeFevre, ain't we?"

"You bet."

"All right, then; here's your gun. If you try any tricks, Hughes, I'd advise that you get me the first shot, for if you miss you'll never have another."

The man drew the sleeve of his coat over his lips, his eyes shifting before the Sergeant's steady gaze.

"I ain't that sort," he muttered uneasily. "Yer don't need to think that o' me."

"Maybe not," and Hamlin swung into the saddle carelessly. "Only I thought I'd tell you beforehand what would happen if you attempt any fool gun play. Take the lead, you know the trail."

Carroll, supporting himself by the table, crept across to the door and watched them, reckless as to the entering cold. The glare of the white snow revealed clearly the outlines of the disappearing horsemen, as they rode cautiously down the bank. The thin fringe of shore ice broke under the weight of the ponies' hoofs, as the riders forced them forward into the icy water. A moment later the two crept up the sharp incline of the opposite shore, appearing distinct against the sky as they attained the summit. Hamlin waved his hand, and then, on a lode, the figures vanished into the gloom. Crying, and swearing at his helplessness, the deserted soldier closed the door and crept back shivering into his blankets.

Hughes turned his horse's head to the southwest, and rode steadily forward, the buffalo overcoat giving him a shaggy, grotesque appearance in the spectral light reflected from the snow. Without a word Hamlin followed, a pace behind. Their route lay for the first few miles across a comparatively level plateau, over which the fierce wind of the late storm had swept with such violence as to leave the surface packed firm. The night shut them in silently, giving to their immediate surroundings a mournful loneliness most depressing. There were no shadows, only the dull snow-gleam across which they passed like

spectres, the only sound the crunching of their horses' hoofs on the crust. The Sergeant, staring about, felt that he had never looked upon a more depressing spectacle than this gloomy landscape, desolate and wind-swept, still overarched with low-lying storm clouds, black and ominous.

They advanced thus for two hours, making no attempt to force their animals, and scarcely exchanging a word, both men watchful of the snow underfoot in search of a possible trail, when the character of the country began to change. The level plain broke into a series of ridges of irregular formation, all evidently heading toward some more southern valley. In the depressions the snow lay banked in deep drifts, and, after plunging desperately through two of these, unable to judge correctly in the dim light where to ride, Hughes turned more to the south, skirting along the bare slope of a ridge, trusting some turn lower down would yield them the necessary westerning.

"It's over the ponies' heads down there, Sergeant," he said, pointing sideways into the dark hollow, "an' we're bound to strike a cross-ridge afore we come to the bluffs."

"What bluffs? The Canadian?"

"Yep; it's badly broken kentry a long ways west o' yere. Bad lands mostly, an' a hell o' a place for cattle to hide out."

"Hughes, do you know where Black Kettle's camp is?"

"Well, no, not exactly. Last winter the Cheyennes was settled 'bout opposite the mouth o' Buffalo creek, an' that're down there somewhere now. That's one thing sure—they ain't any east o' that. As we ain't hit no trail, I reckon as how LeFevre's outfit must hev drifted further then I calculated."

"I thought so at the time," commented the other, quietly. "However, we will have to make the circle, and if the country out yonder is as you describe, they will be no better off. They'll have to follow the ridges to get through. We may get a glimpse when daylight comes."

They rode on steadily, keeping down below the crest of the hills, yet picking a passage where the snow had been swept clear. The slipperiness of the incline made their progress slow, as they dared not risk the breaking of a horse's leg in that wilderness, and the faint glimmer was most confusing. The wind had ceased, the calm was impressive after the wild tumult, but the cold seemed to strengthen as the dawn advanced, viciously biting the exposed faces of the men. The straining ponies were white with frost. In the gray of a cheerless dawn they reached the first line of bluffs, and drew rein just below the summit, where they could look off across the lower ridges to the westward.

It was a wild, desolate scene, the dull gray sky overhead, the black and white shading below. Mile on mile the picture unrolled to the horizon, the vista widening slowly as the light increased, bringing forth the details of barren, wind-swept ridges and shallow valleys choked with snow. Not a tree, not a shrub, not even a rock



Plunged Profanely into the Drift.

broke the dead monotony. All was loneliness and silence. The snow lay gleaming and untrampled, except as here and there a dull brown patch of dead grass darkened the side of a hill. Hamlin shadowed his eyes with gloved hands, studying intently inch by inch the wide domain. Suddenly he arose

in his stirrups, bending eagerly forward.

"By heaven! There they are, Hughes," he exclaimed, feeling the hot blood course through his veins. "See, on the incline of that third ridge. There is a shadow there, and they are not moving. Here; draw in back of me; now you can see. It looks as though they had a horse down."

Hughes stared long in the direction indicated, his eyes narrowed into mere slits.

"Ah! that's it," he said at last. "Horse broke a leg; shot it jest then—I seen the flash. Now they're goin' on. See! One fellow climbin' up behind 'nother, an' the horse left lyin' there on the snow."

"How many people do you make out?" and Hamlin's voice shook a little. "There's four, ain't there?"

At that distance the fugitives looked like mere black dots. It could scarcely be determined that they moved, and yet their outlines were distinct against the background of white snow, while the two watchers possessed the trained vision of the plains. Hughes answered after a deliberate inspection, without so much as turning his head.

"That's four; leastwise that was four horses, and two—the Indians like—are ridin' double. That animals are 'bout played, it looks ter me—just able ter crawl. Ain't had no fodder 'bout the size o' it. We ought to be able ter head that bunch off 'fore they git to the Canadian at that rate o' travel—hey, Sergeant?"

Hamlin's eyes followed the long sweep of the cross-ridge, studying its trend, and the direction of the intervening valleys. Once down on the other slope all this extensive view would be hidden; they would have to ride blindly, guessing at the particular swale along which those others were advancing. To come to the summit again would surely expose them to those keen Indian eyes. They would be searching the trail ahead ceaselessly, noting every object along the crests of the ridges. However, if the passage around was not blocked with snow, they ought to attain the junction in ample time. With twice as far to travel, their ponies were strong and fit and should win out against LeFevre's starved beasts. He waved his gloved hand.

"We'll try it," he said, shortly; "come on, Hughes."

He led off along the steep side of the hill, and forcing his horse into a sharp trot, headed straight out into the white wilderness; Hughes, without uttering a word, brought down his quirt on his pony's flank and followed.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## The Fight in the Snow.

The slope toward the south had not been swept clear by the wind, and the horses broke through the crust to their knees, occasionally stumbling into hollows where the drifts were deep. This made progress slow, although Hamlin pressed forward recklessly, fully aware of what it would mean should the fugitives emerge first, and thus achieve a clear passage to the river. What was going on there to the right, behind the fringe of low hills, could not be conjectured, but to the left the riders could see clearly for a great distance over the desolate, snow-draped land, down to the dark waters of the Canadian and the shore beyond. It was all a desolate waste, barren of movement, and no smoke bore evidence of any Indian encampment near by. A mile or more to the west the river took a sharp bend, disappearing behind the bluffs, and on the open plain, barely visible against the unswollen mantle of snow, were dark specks, apparently moving, but in erratic fashion. The distance intervening was too great for either man to distinguish exactly what these might be, yet as they plunged onward their keen eyes searched the valley vigilantly through the cold clear air.

"Some of your long-horns, Hughes?" asked the Sergeant finally, pointing as he turned and glanced back. "Quite a bunch of cattle, it looks to me."

"Them that ain't cows," returned the other positively. "That're too closely bunched up. I reckon it'll be Black Kettle's pony herd."

"Then his village will lie in beyond the big bend th' re," and Hamlin rose in his stirrups, shading his eyes. "The herders haven't driven them far since the storm broke. You don't see any smoke, do you?"

Hughes shook his head.

"You wouldn't likely see none against the gray sky; them ponies is two or maybe three miles off, an' their camp is likely a mile or so further. That's a big bend that, as I remember; a sort o' level spot with bluff all 'round, 'cept on the side o' the river. We had a cattle corral there on't, durin' a round-up. Most likely that's whar they are."

"And LeFevre is heading straight for the spot. Well, he'll have to come out on this bench first."

"Yep, there sure ain't no valleys lying between. How many o' these yere gulch openings have we got past already?"

"Three; there's the fourth just ahead. That's the one they were trail-

ing through. No doubt about that, is there?"

"Not less them Indians took to the ridge. They was sure in the fourth valley when we first sighted the outfit back thar. Whatcher goin' ter do, Sergeant? Jump 'em a horse-back, an' just pump 'em?"

Hamlin had thought this over as he rode and already had planned his attack. The opening to the valley along which LeFevre's exhausted party were slowly advancing toward them, seemed favorable—it was narrow and badly choked with snow. It offered an ideal place for a surprise and was far enough away from the Indian encampment—if the latter was situated as Hughes believed, in the great bend above—so that no echo of shots would carry that distance, even through the crisp atmosphere. There were two things the Sergeant had determined to accomplish if possible—the rescue of Miss Molly injured, and the capture of LeFevre. No matter how deeply he despised the man he could not afford to have him killed. So far as the Indians were concerned there would be no mercy shown, for it either one escaped he would carry the news to the village. With all this in mind the Sergeant swung out of the saddle, dropping the rein to the ground, confident that the tired cowpony would remain quiet. His belt was buckled outside the array overcoat, and he drew his revolver, tested it, and slipped it back loosely into the holster. Then he pulled out the rifle from under the flap of the saddle, grimly handling it in his gloved fingers. Hughes, his head sunk into his fur collar, his hot breath steaming in the cold atmosphere, watched him curiously.

"Lookin' fer a right smart fight, I reckon," he said, a trifle uneasily. "Believe me, yer ain't goin' ter find that



"By Heavens! There They Are, Hughes."

fellar no spring chicken. He's some on their gun play."

"I hope he knows enough to quit when he's cornered," returned the other pleasantly, sweeping his eyes to the opening in the hills, "for I'm aiming to take him back to Kansas alive."

"The hell ye are!"

"That's the plan, partner, and I've got reason for it. I knew LeFevre once, years ago, during the war, and I've been some anxious to get my hands on him ever since. He's worth far more to me alive than dead, just now, Hughes," his voice hardening. "You'll bear that fact in mind when the fracas begins. From now on this is my affair, not yours. You understand? You get busy with the two bucks, and leave the white man to me. Come on now—dismount."

Hughes came to the ground with evident reluctance, swearing savagely. "What do yer think I'm yere for," he demanded roughly, "if it wa'n't to shoot that cuss?"

Hamlin strode swiftly over, and dropped a hand on the shaggy shoulder.

"You are here because I ordered you to come with me; because if you hadn't I would have killed you back there in the shack, you red-handed murderer. Now listen, Hughes, I know what you are—a cattle thief. You and LeFevre belong to the same outfit, only he was the smelter of the two. I have spared your life for a purpose, and if you fail me now I'll shoot you down as I would a dog. Don't try to threaten me, you cur, for I am not that kind. I am not trusting you; I haven't from the first, but you are going into this fight on my side, and under my orders."

The two men glared into each other's eyes, silent, breathing hard, but there was a grim determination about the Sergeant's set jaw that left Hughes speechless. He grinned weakly, stamping down the snow under foot. Hamlin's continued silence brought a protest to his lips.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Too Good to Lend.

Agnes—This novel looks awfully interesting. Is it good?

Glady's—It's perfectly splendid. I'd lend it to you in a minute, but it belongs to me—Life.

of the house if she had remembered his instructions.

"Indeed, sir, I do," was the response. "I hang the thing right up there and I watch it carefully to see it does not get too high."

"Good!" exclaimed the doctor. "And what do you do when the temperature rises above 70 degrees?"

"Why, sir," answered the woman, with the air of one faithful to a trust, "when it gets too high I take it down and put it outside until it cools off."

—Newark Star.

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## Correct the Habit Habit

The surest way to bring on premature old age is to get into a rut. On the other hand, the surest way to avert old age is to get out of the rut. If you desire to keep young, do not make your habits hard and fast, or your arteries will likewise become so. Govern your habits; do not let them rule you. Just to show them that they do not, order them to break ranks from time to time.—Train and Brawn.

## Life Without Lace

"One can't help thinking what a colorless life a man is forced to lead, when one reflects that chiffon and Venetian point and hand embroidery and Irish crochet are to him mere empty words. Whereas a woman, whether she is interested in babies, or microbes, or husbands, or poetry or Plato, or bridge is fundamentally and always interested in clothes.—From Daddy-Long Legs, by Jean Webster.

## Early Days of Cigarmaking

At one time in the early history of this country cigarmaking was an important industry in Germany and large quantities of German-made cigars came to the United States. The first separate tabulation of cigar imports was in 1804, and in that year four million were brought into the United States, nearly all of them coming from the West Indies.

## True Wealth

There is no wealth but life, including all its powers of love, of joy and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is the richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence.—Ruskin.

## Hookworm Disease

The hookworm disease is so named from a small parasite which fastens itself in the intestines and preys upon the system. The name hookworm relates to the peculiar structure of the parasite (which has been named Necator Americanus) and the disease is attributed to low nutrition and unsanitary conditions.

## Whales Target of Torpedo Boat

The novel scene of a torpedo boat hunting whales was witnessed at Porto Anzio, Italy, a few days ago. The operations of a fishing fleet had been interrupted by the appearance of two large whales. The torpedo boat put out in pursuit of the whales, and killed them both with their guns.

## Evergreen Scent

Evergreen trees of any kind can be made to yield up their sweet scent in the winter if their branches and boughs be gathered for use in the open fire. The needles will usually fall as the branches dry, but if they are dried on newspapers or a large sheet of cheesecloth they can be easily gathered up to burn. Pine trees are especially fragrant and pine cones make a roaring and picturesque fire, besides giving off a breath of the pine woods whenever they are burned.

## Celebrities Unfairly Treated

In 1849 Poe wrote: "Everybody says that if I lecture again and get the ticket at 50 cents I will clear \$100. I never was received with so much enthusiasm. I lectured at Norfolk and cleared enough to settle my bill at Madison House (Richmond) and \$200 over." Set against this, ye who blush unduly at the memory of pirated editions, the \$95,000 that Dickens cleared on his American tour.—Algonnon Tassin, in the Bookman.

## Misshapen Dog

A French scientist possesses a dog which, having been born without hind legs, has supplied nature's deficiency and has learned to walk and even to run quite swiftly on its two front legs. It holds the upright position with the greatest ease, turns, stops, stands resting, eats its food, etc., with its hind quarters poised over its head. It is said not to be more weary by exercise than an ordinary dog.

## Home and Heart

My home is as much of nature as my heart embraces. If I only warm my house, then that only is my home. But if I sympathize with the sounds and silences of nature, and share the repose and equanimity that reign around me in the fields, then are they my house, as much as if the kettle clock ticked on the wall.—Thoreau.

## Bank Notes That Talk

Bank notes that speak have been patented by an English inventor, to baffle forgers. The edge of the note is perforated so that, when placed in a phonograph, the rough edge generates sound waves that form words. A disputed note placed in the machine would say, for instance, "I am a genuine five-pound note."

## Weather Forecast

When the horns of the moon are clearly discernible by the naked eye, it means that there is nothing in the atmosphere to obscure them. An atmosphere as clear as this generally indicates that it has been swept by the winds in the upper ether, and these winds will probably reach the earth before long.

## Keeping Cheese

To prevent cheese from getting hard cut a small piece off for present use and place the remainder in cool safe. Spread a thin film of butter over the cut part and cover with a clean cloth. This will prevent that hard, cracked condition which ruins the best of cheese.

## Daily Healthgram

A cup of hot milk, sipped slowly just before retiring, often induces sleep. A brisk walk, half an hour or so before retiring, is another sleep producer. A moderate, comfortable bed, plenty of air and light, but sufficiently warm bedding, are other first aids to proper sleep.

## Petrel

The small seafowl called petrel was so named because when flying its feet frequently brush the water, which suggested the walking of Peter on the water.

## SETTLED STATUS OF POET

Douglas Jerrold's Verdict Will Be Indorsed by Many Who Have Tried to Read Browning.

The writings of Robert Browning, which are in great favor among an aesthetic few but continue to be caviar to the general public, probably received their keenest criticism from Douglas Jerrold half a century ago. Jerrold was recovering from a violent illness when a copy of Browning's

"Bordello" fell into the hands of the convalescent. He began to read, but not a complete idea could he get from that mystic production. The thought then struck him that he had lost his reason during his illness. Filled with agony, a perspiration burst from his brow. At that moment his wife entered the room. "Read this, my dear," he cried out, thrusting the volume into her hands. After several attempts to make any sense out of it, as Jerrold related, she returned it, saying, "Bother the gibberish! I don't un-

derstand a word of it!" "Thank heaven," exclaimed Jerrold, "then I am not an idiot after all!"

## Too Tender With It.

A physician tells a story of a philanthropic doctor in a Pennsylvania coal mining town who presented each household with a nice new thermometer and told the people the necessity of maintaining a proper temperature. When making his rounds one day he observed his thermometer hanging in the room. He inquired of the woman